

Mr. Speaker, today I reflect on the gentleman from Iowa's almost four decades of public service, 30 of them as a distinguished Member of this House of Representatives. I am referring to my friend, Jim Leach.

For many of the 12,000 men and women privileged to serve in the House of Representatives since the founding of the Republic, their careers are distinguished by service in this Chamber. Jim Leach is one of those rare individuals for whom Congress itself is distinguished by his service. There is no one from whom I have learned more by his words, his deeds and his friendship. He is one of the few among us who, when he speaks on the floor of the House, people who care about substance listen. He consistently chooses the right words, and invites people to be part of the process. He listens. He is never drawn into petty partisan politics that too often rear their ugly heads.

For 30 years we have been privileged to watch his conscientious and thoughtful work on the Financial Services and International Relations committees. Jim predicted the savings and loan crisis, and was spot on in his observations about American diplomacy from the Middle East to North Korea.

He was always dignified and principled, one of the few people who navigated the legislative halls successfully without being mired in partisan politics.

Indeed, in his congressional campaigns, he refused PAC contributions, didn't want out-of-State donations, he wouldn't run negative ads, and he rejected outside groups who tried to run negative ads on his behalf. He may have actually won his election by playing by the rules widely accepted as the norm and by which most prefer to operate. He may have won, but it wouldn't have been Jim Leach and we all would have been the poorer.

While Iowa has lost Jim's service to Congress, America need not lose his service, his intellect and his unique talents. Ambassador John Bolton's appointment to the United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations expires at the end of the year, and the United States cannot afford a gap in our representation. We desperately need a strong, positive direction to guide multilateral diplomacy in the United Nations.

There is not another American who is better suited to advancing United States interests in that important forum by temperament, experience or intellect than Jim Leach. Remember, as a young foreign service officer, he actually served at the United Nations under then-ambassador George H.W. Bush before returning to Iowa as part of his family's business, and then on to 30 distinguished years of service in this body.

If anything, Jim may be better suited as a diplomat than at partisan politics. He is the most diplomatic politician I have ever met. Black and white was not Jim's view of the world, especially if grays and even colors were part of the picture.

This week my colleague Jim Walsh and I will be circulating a "Dear Colleague" letter to Members of the House of Representatives on both sides of the aisle, a letter that would urge President Bush to consider the appointment of Jim Leach as our Permanent Representative to the United Nations. It is a nomination that no doubt would be greeted by acclaim. It would pass the United States Senate I predict unanimously, and we would all be the better off.

I strongly urge my colleagues to join us in signing this letter for the nomination of Jim Leach.